Beware the Grim Reaper of Complacency

Presented by Pat Furr
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Introduction

- A safe workplace is provided by addressing two main areas; working conditions and human behavior

- It is important to provide safe conditions – tools, environment, facilities, PPE etc. - but equally important is to address human behavior

- The majority of accidents are due to unsafe acts not unsafe conditions
Introduction

Human attributes versus human behavior

• Examples of Attributes: technical knowledge, skills, intelligence

• Examples of Behavior: risk taking, motivation or lack thereof, and proneness to complacency
Introduction

Should we expect positive behavioral change to solve all our safety deficiencies?

Must be in concert with safe work conditions

– In fact, safe working conditions are necessary to demonstrate to employees that they are being supported

Don’t try to force behavior change

– Encourage, acknowledge, and support it
Overview

- The Path to Complacency
- Recognizing Complacency
- Understanding the Consequences
- Tools to Combat Complacency
The Path to Complacency

- To *varying degrees* we are all susceptible to complacency
- Various personality traits can either combat or accelerate the onset of complacency
- External influences can accelerate or abate the onset of complacency
The Path to Complacency

• Personality traits that may help combat complacency
  • Attentive to detail/focus
  • Willingness to actively engage in safety culture
  • Optimism (w/caveat)/high expectations
  • Success oriented
  • Conscientious
The Path to Complacency

- Personality traits that may accelerate onset of complacency
  - Pessimism
  - Accepts failure
  - Impulsive
  - Poor attention
  - Contentment
  - Risk taker/Over-confident
  - Perceived safety
    - Would never happen to me
The Path to Complacency

- External influences that may affect onset of complacency
  - Routine task and outcome
    - Good habits vs. bad habits
    - Avoiding autopilot
  - Deadlines/falling behind
  - Lack of, or diminished job security
  - Absence of leadership
  - Observed complacency in co-workers
  - Distractions on and off the job
The Path to Complacency

• Recipe for accident is a dangerous work environment combined with complacent worker(s)

• Do we invest time and effort changing our worker’s behavior, or do we concentrate on environmental factors?
The Path to Complacency

• Understanding complacency and realizing its role as a root cause in accidents is as important as understanding and addressing environmental factors.

• Understanding root cause has to go beyond linking cause to complacent behavior. Ask what led to that behavior?
Recognizing Complacency

• Defined: Self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies

• An emotional state where we are oblivious to danger

• Insidious unless you are actively guarding against it
Recognizing Complacency

• Early signs of complacency
  • Realizing you are distracted from the task at hand
  • Making mistakes that you would normally not make
  • Starting to take shortcuts
  • Observing complacent behavior in others and not addressing it
  • The “Devils Circle”
Recognizing Complacency

• “It only takes a moment of complacency to lead to an accident”

• Do you really believe that accidents occur because of an isolated moment of complacency?
  – Or

• Were there opportunities to recognize and stop complacency before the accident?
Understanding the Consequences

- What is the nature of the hazards?
- Think “What if?”
- Study a little history
- Consider the domino effect
- Consider employee’s behavior history in HR decisions and work assignments
Tools to Combat Complacency

• Provide awareness training

• Refocusing on hazards/JSA
  • Employees lead the way

• Report all near misses/Safety Observations and learn from them

• Instill good habits/new habits
Tools to Combat Complacency

• Actively decide (avoid autopilot)

• Stay in the moment
  • This is an example of a new habit

• If you say to yourself “I need to remember to do this” create a reliable reminder
Tools to Combat Complacency

- **Management Involvement** – Show your face/listen/understand/respond
- **Employee involvement**
  - Observe peers, coach, and encourage
  - Feedback to management on employee concerns
  - Collaborate seeking solutions
- **If possible, rotate job assignments to avoid routine**
Summary

• Understanding complacency’s role in overall safety is just one facet of a comprehensive safety program
• It is a big part of BBS
• Accepting that we are all prone to complacency is first step
• Recognizing, understanding the consequences, and knowing how to combat it is our goal
Questions?
Discussion

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